

**BOARD OF REGISTERED NURSING**

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**RN SUPERVISION OF MEDICAL ASSISTANT**

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The classification of medical assistant is defined under the provisions of the Medical Practice Act, Business and Professions Code (B&P), Sections 2069-2071 and in Title 16 of the California Code of Regulations, §§ 1366-1366.4. The Medical Board has discussed the use of medical assistants on page 5 of its publication, *Action Report*, January 1998. Some of the information is presented below. If you wish to talk with the Medical Board about medical assistant laws and regulations, please call (916) 263-2393. The Medical Board web site can be reached at [www.medbd.ca.gov](http://www.medbd.ca.gov).

Information provided by the Medical Board states that the medical assistant laws broadly define a medical assistant as an unlicensed person who provides administrative, clerical and technical support to the physician. The licensed physician and surgeon or licensed podiatrist is required to be physically present in the treatment facility when the medical assistant is performing procedures. The law does allow a medical assistant to administer medication and withdraw blood with specified training and conditions. The supervising physician or podiatrist can, at his discretion, provide written instructions to be followed by the medical assistant in performance of tasks or supportive services. Such written instructions may provide that a physician assistant (PA), or registered nurse (RN) may assign a task to the medical assistant as authorized by the physician or podiatrist. The regulations state that RNs may train medical assistants to perform technical support services.

The law prohibits the medical assistant from providing technical support services or procedures for patient care in a general acute care hospital. The law also prohibits the Medical Board from writing regulations authorizing acts that involve diagnosing or treating such as using laser or suturing. The Medical Board has made the following interpretations: no intravenous administration; no limit on medication except no anesthesia; the pre-labeled medication container must be shown to the licensed person prior to administration; the medical assistant may obtain test results but may do no interpretation of the data. The responsibility for the appropriate use of medical assistants rests with the physician.

**BRN Interpretation**

It is the position of the Board of Registered Nursing that an RN can train medical assistants in any of the above procedures. The registered nurse may supervise medical assistants in the performance of the above tasks, as directed by the licensed physician and surgeon or the licensed podiatrist, providing:

- there are written instructions/policies from the doctor(s) within the facility authorizing the registered nurse to assign a task authorized by a physician or podiatrist,
- a supervising physician and surgeon or podiatrist is in the facility,
- the registered nurse has assessed the individual medical assistant's competence to perform the task,
- there is documentation of the physician's patient-specific order for the task (other than routine screening procedures),
- performance of the task by the medical assistant is documented in the patient record.

**Medical assistant** "means a person who may be unlicensed, who performs basic administrative, clerical, and technical supportive services in compliance with this section and Section 2070 for a licensed physician and surgeon or a licensed podiatrist, or group thereof, for a medical or podiatry corporation, or for a health care services plan, who is at least 18 years of age, and who has had at least the minimum amount of hours of appropriate training pursuant to standards established by the Division of Licensing. The medical assistant shall be issued a certificate by the training institution or instructor indicating satisfactory completion of the required training. A copy of the certificate shall be retained as a record by each employer of the medical assistant". (B&P, Sections 2069, 2070, 2071)

**Specific Authorization** “means a specific written order prepared by the supervising physician and surgeon or the supervising podiatrist authorizing the procedures to be performed on a patient, which shall be placed in the patient’s medical record; or a standing order prepared by the supervising physician and surgeon or the supervising podiatrist authorizing the procedures to be performed, the duration of which shall be consistent with accepted medical practice. A notation of the standing order shall be placed in the patient’s medical record”. (B&P, Section 2069(b))

**Supervision** “means the supervision of procedures authorized by this section by a licensed physician and surgeon or by a licensed podiatrist, within the scope of his or her practice, who shall be physically present in the treatment facility during the performance of such procedures”.  
(B&P, Section 2069(b))

**Technical supportive services** “means simple routine medical tasks and procedures which may be safely performed by a medical assistant who has limited training and who functions under the supervision of a licensed physician and surgeon or a licensed podiatrist” (B&P, Section 2069(b)).

In 1992 the Division of Licensing of the Medical Board adopted regulations for medical assistants which established standards for **technical supportive services** that may be performed by a medical assistant (California Code of Regulations, CCR, §1366-1366.4). The medical assistant can perform the technical supportive services if not prohibited by another provision of law and is a usual and customary part of the medical or podiatric practice where the medical assistant is employed. The supervising physician or podiatrist authorizes the medical assistant to perform the service, and is responsible for patient’s treatment and care. The supervising physician or podiatrist can, at his discretion, provide written instructions to be followed by the medical assistant in performance of tasks or supportive services. Such written instructions may provide that a physician assistant, PA, or registered nurse, RN, may assign a task as authorized by a physician or podiatrist (B&P, Section 1366(a)(5)). CCR 1366 states that technical support services include:

1. Administer medication orally, sublingually, topically, vaginally or rectally, or by providing a single dose to a patient for immediate self-administration. Administer medication by inhalation if the medications are patient-specific and have been or will be routinely and repetitively administered to that patient. In every instance, prior to administration of medication by the medical assistant, a licensed physician or podiatrist, or another person authorized by law to do so shall verify the correct medication and dosage. Nothing in this section shall be construed as authorizing the administration of any anesthetic agent by a medical assistant.
2. Perform electrocardiogram, electroencephalogram, or plethysmography tests, except full body plethysmography. Nothing in this section shall permit a medical assistant to perform tests involving the penetration of human tissues except for skin tests as provided in Section 2069 of the code, or to interpret test findings or results.
3. Apply and remove bandages and dressings; apply orthopedic appliances such as knee immobilizers, envelope slings, orthotics, and similar devices; remove casts, splints and other external devices; obtain impressions for orthotics, padding and custom molded shoes; select and adjust crutches to patient; and instruct patient in proper use of crutches.
4. Remove sutures or staples from superficial incisions or lacerations.
5. Perform ear lavage to remove impacted cerumen.
6. Collect by non-invasive techniques, and reserve specimens for testing, including urine, sputum, semen and stool.
7. Assist patients in ambulation and transfers.
8. Prepare patients for and assist the physician, podiatrist, physician assistant or registered nurse in examinations or procedures including positioning, draping, shaving and disinfecting treatment sites; prepare a patient for gait analysis testing.
9. As authorized by a physician or podiatrist, provide patient information and instructions.
10. Collect and record patient data including height, weight, temperature, pulse, respiration rate and blood pressure, and basic information about the presenting and previous conditions.
11. Perform simple laboratory and screening tests customarily performed in a medical office.
12. Cut the nails of otherwise healthy patients.
  - a. Nothing in this section prohibits the administration of first aid or cardiopulmonary resuscitation in an emergency.

- b. Nothing in these regulations shall be construed to authorize a medical assistant to practice physical therapy.
- c. Nothing in these regulations shall be construed to modify the requirement that a licensed physician or podiatrist be physically present in the treatment facility as required in Section 2069 of the code.
- d. A medical assistant may also fit prescription lenses or use any optical device in connection with ocular exercises, visual training, vision training, or orthoptics pursuant to Sections 2544 and 3042 of the code, but nothing in these regulations shall require a technician performing only those functions permitted by Sections 2544 and 3042 of the code to be qualified as a medical assistant.

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MEDICAL ASSISTANT INFORMATION, MOST OFTEN ASKED QUESTIONS.